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ABSTRACT

To determine the readiness of teachers, not currently involved directly with instructing educable mentally retarded (EMR) students, to integrate such students in regular classrooms, 129 regular classroom teachers from elementary schools were surveyed. Among conclusions were that regular teachers see a need for experimentation regarding the teaching of EMR students; that regular teachers would accept EMR students for academic subjects if they can perform the work; and that the regular teacher is receptive to the EMR teacher's recommendation that the EMR student be placed in the regular classroom. (SBH)

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ATTITUDES OF REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHERS TOWARD EMR STUDENTS[1]

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Introduction

Increasing pressure is being placed upon teachers, administrators, and public officials to "mainstream" EMR (educable mentally retarded) students; i.e., place them in classes with regular students for instruction. Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, is interpreted by some as giving a strong impetus to integration of so-called "special" students wherever possible (Ballard and Zettel, 1977). The concept of mainstreaming is in marked contrast to providing special teachers in self-contained classrooms, each of which contains only those students who legally qualify for the special or EMR designation. The practice of preparing specially certified EMR teachers by teacher preparation institutions, while meeting the demand for personnel with skills to meet the needs of these handicapped students, has also tended to reinforce the practice of isolating these students in classrooms of homogeneously labeled students. While this controversy may never be resolved for some, the shift in legislative sentiment, coupled with recent research on the effects of integrating regular and EMR students, demands that careful consideration, if not prescriptive action, be taken by educational administrators and teachers to heterogeneous grouping.

This study reports results of a survey of regular classroom teachers' attitudes toward EMR students and toward integration of these students in regular classroom settings. The major intent was to determine the readiness of teachers, not currently involved directly with instructing these students, to integrate such students in regular classrooms. In addition, the study compares the attitudes of teachers who teach in schools with one or more EMR classrooms to the attitudes of teachers who teach in buildings without EMR students.

Four basic questions were posed via a 12 item questionnaire developed for the study. These questions were:

--What is the regular teacher's attitude toward the EMR student's academic achievement as compared to the regular student?

--In what areas can the EMR student be integrated with the regular student?

--Does the regular classroom teacher feel competent to work with the EMR student?

--How do teachers in buildings containing EMR classes differ in attitude from those teachers in schools without EMR students?

Although there is extensive research dealing with the effects of integrating the EMR student with the regular class, the effects of teacher attitude toward the integration of these students is less well investigated. This would seem to be a serious shortcoming if the comment of Roubinek (Roubinek, 1978) with regard to PL 94-142 and mainstreaming is taken seriously.

> Nothing of any consequence will ever change in education without the assistance and support of the classroom teacher (p. 411).

Such a statement suggests that the success or failure of mainstreaming may be directly related to teacher attitude and with the ability of those in leadership positions to influence teachers to alter those attitudes which are antagonistic to the concept of mainstreaming and its being carried out in their schools and classrooms.

Research-Conceptual Framework

The efficacy of special class placement has been questioned by several writers. Various hypotheses are made as to the results of placement options. Dunn (1968) drew attention to special education when he called for a moratorium on placement of mentally retarded children in special classes. MacMillan (1971) concluded: "We do not yet understand the effects of placement on personality. On the one hand we find evidence indicating that the child suffers in a special class, while on the other, the evidence indicates that he suffers in the regular class."

More recently studies have tended to show the positive effects of mainstreaming on the academic and social achievement of students. Bradfield, Brown,

Kaplan, Richert, and Stannard (1973) concluded that the handicapped and non-handicapped in an integrated setting improved as much or more than the controls in academic skills, social behavior, and attitude changes. Therefore, the EMR child in the regular class can gain as much as or more than children in self-contained EMR units.

Haring and Krug (1945) conducted an experimental individualized instructional program that would facilitate the return of special education students to the regular education classrooms. A year-long followup study was conducted. The results indicated that a high percentage of students could acquire basic skills at a rate to facilitate regular classroom placement. The study further showed that once placed, the students maintained the academic and behavioral adjustments. The conclusions indicated that to be successful, academic and social preparation is necessary.

Calhoun and Elliott (1977) compared regular class placement and special class placement and concluded that the educable retarded groups in the regular programs self-concept and achievement results were significantly better than those assigned to the special classes.

Regarding social development, Johnson (1950) and Baldwin (1958) concluded that the educable mentally retarded children are not socially accepted and this was usually related to antisocial behaviors of mentally retarded students. They further suggested that these antisocial behaviors were compensatory reactions to failure and feelings of inadequacy in the regular grades. Rucker and Vincenzo (1970) found that by pairing unpopular EMR students with popular students to plan a skit, that the acceptance of the EMR students improved but diminished when the project ended.

In 1974 Iano, Ayers, Keller, Gettigan, and Walker conducted a study to demonstrate the use of an integration resource room to facilitate the social

integration of EMR students in the regular grades. The results were not supportive.

Recently, a number of studies have been conducted regarding the integration of pre-school handicapped with the non-handicapped. Peterson, Peterson, and Scriven (1977) concluded that both non-handicapped and handicapped pre-schoolers were more likely to imitate a non-handicapped peer than a handicapped one.

The effects of labels and stigma have also been examined. What affect does labeling have on a student? Meyerowitz (1962) found that the student's self-concept drops following placement in EMR. In 1968 Rosenthal and Jacobson revealed research that concluded that teacher expectations about the performance of children can come to serve as a self-fulfilling prophesy. The results of research conducted by Richmond and Dalton (1973) indicated that the self-images of these pupils are positively related to the teachers' image of their academic ability.

Gullung and Rucker (1977) investigated two methods of describing handicapped children to teachers: labeled and unlabeled behavioral descriptions. The Rucker-Goble Educational Programming Scale (Rucker and Goble, 1973) was utilized to measure the effects of unlabeled behavioral descriptions on the expectations of teachers. The participant selected what he considered the most appropriate educational placement for each child. The results indicated that the regular education teachers have lower exepctations for children who are labeled than children with identical behaviors who are not labeled. Therefore, labels carry a negative connotation that results in lower teacher expectations for both the regular and special education teacher. Bradfield, Brown, Kaplan, Richert, and Stannard (1973) concluded that labels tend to fade in the integrated setting.

The Fountain Valley, California, school system utilizes a "Children Without Labels" approach (Belken, 1974). Handicapped students are mainstreamed in an

instructional environment involving team teaching, differential staffing and individualized plans for each child. At the close of the 1973-74 school year, Teacher Reaction Questionnaires were distributed with responses ranging from very uncomfortable (1) to comfortable (7). The regular classroom teachers obtained lower scores than the special teachers on this questionnaire.

Teacher attitudes have been found to vary depending upon several controllable factors. Haring, Stern, and Cruickshank (1958) conducted a study to determine the extent to which the attitudes of regular classroom teachers can be modified toward greater or more realistic acceptance of exceptional children. The Classroom Integration Inventory was administered which consists of thirty items, each describing a deviate child in behavioral terms. This was followed by a workshop which resulted in an increased acceptance of exceptional children. The authors found that integration can be more effectively achieved when accompanied by supportive experiences such as workshops and orientation courses. These are effective in increasing the information teachers have about special students.

Shotel, Iano, and McGettigan (1972) used a 13 item yes-no questionnaire to examine teachers' attitudes toward placement of the handicapped in the regular program with resource room support. The academic and social adjustment of the handicapped, teacher competencies for teaching handicapped children, and the need for special methods and materials to do the job were examined. The results indicated that the educable retarded did not achieve well academically and socially; they were often among the lowest achievers, were not participating in general class activities and were frequently teased by the other children.

The Penckney Project (1974) involved assessment of the regular classroom teachers' feelings about the mainstreaming project and its effectiveness with the special students. On a scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) the results indicated the teachers felt the project was successful.

An important part in the success of any integration project deals with the building principal. Payne and Murray (1974) conducted a study to examine the elementary principal's attitude toward the placement of the handicapped in the regular classroom. The results indicated that urban elementary principals are more reluctant to integrate the handicapped in the regular program than suburban elementary principals.

Method

A twelve item, nominal category response format was used to measure teacher attitudes toward EMR students and to their integration into regular classrooms. The survey was conducted twice, once with teachers who taught in buildings that contained an EMR classroom and once with teachers from buildings that were without EMR students.

Teachers were selected from throughout one county in Northeast Ohio. From the 38 schools that contained one or more EMR classrooms a representative sample of 15 schools was selected. A distribution of teachers from each of grades one through six was included from each school. Eighty surveys were distributed to this group of teachers; 68 surveys were returned for a response of over 80 percent.

The second sampling was similarly carried out in schools without an EMR classroom. Sixty-one percent or fifty-one surveys were returned from this second sample. A total of 129 teachers comprised the combined sample.

Frequencies were tallied for each item. Percents were computed by item for the combined sample and for each separate sample. For the two different groups of teachers the chi square test of significance was calculated to determine possible significant differences.

We anticipated the following results for these regular teachers:

1. The self-contained classroom will be favored for the EMR student.

2. The label "EMR" will be considered an adequate descriptor of these students.

3. Teachers will perceive greater benefits derived by the EMR students from the self-contained EMR classroom (socially and academically).

4. The EMR curriculum is perceived to be different from the regular curriculum.

5. The regular teacher should not be expected to work with the EMR student.

6. If the EMR student is in the regular classroom, he should be expected to complete the same work as the regular student.

7. The regular classroom teacher will need additional training to work with the EMR student.

Results

Thirty-four percent agreed that the self-contained EMR classroom is the best approach. Another fifty-six percent felt that self-contained was good, but experimentation was needed. Overall ten percent felt that the self-contained EMR classroom should be discontinued.

It came as a mild surprise that forty-nine percent of responders said that the EMR label should be changed. The remainder felt that it best described these students. Fifty-six percent of the teachers felt that students would make the most academic progress in the self-contained EMR classroom. Forty-two percent thought half-time placement in the regular classroom would maximize academic progress for the EMR student. Only two percent felt that full-time placement in the regular classroom would be most helpful academically. Socially, respondents reported that EMR students progress more slowly than their regular counterparts.

Our prediction about the perceived curriculum needs of EMR students was borne out. Fifty-four percent of teachers felt that the EMR curriculum is entirely different. Another thirty-five percent felt that it was a watered-down version of the regular curriculum. Eleven percent thought it was the same as the regular program.

Seventy-three percent, a large majority, reported that the regular classroom teacher would be willing to work with the EMR student upon the recommendation of the EMR teacher. In addition it was expected by ninety-nine percent of teachers that the EMR teacher would provide all or a part of the materials necessary to provide individual instruction to meet the needs of the EMR student.

Seventy-seven percent reported that they would expect an EMR student in their class to complete the same work as the regular student with some exceptions made to accommodate specific handicaps.

Regarding the need for additional training or assistance, forty percent of responders indicated that more specific training was needed; fifty-five percent indicated that they could work with EMR students if they had assistance from a trained EMR teacher.

On nine of the twelve items there was general agreement between those who worked in schools with EMR classrooms and those teachers who did not have EMR students and EMR teachers in their buildings. There was a significant difference on the item dealing with the self-contained classroom for the EMR student. Interestingly, the teachers who taught in schools without an EMR classroom reported ten times more often that the self-contained classroom should be discontinued. They felt less strongly that the self-contained classroom was the best approach.

A second item which was significantly different was that which dealt with the labeling of EMR students. More of the teachers from schools that did not have an EMR classroom felt that the label was the best descriptor.

The third item for which there was a significant difference dealt with the preparation of individualized instruction materials for the EMR student. Again the teachers from schools without the EMR classroom felt more consistently that the EMR teacher should provide all the necessary materials for the regular teacher.

Conclusions

The following statements appear to summarize results of the questionnaire:

1. Regular teachers see a need for experimentation regarding the teaching of EMR students.

2. Regular teachers would accept EMR students for academic subjects if they can perform the work.

3. EMR students should participate with regular students in all non-academic activities such as music, art, clubs, etc.

4. The EMR student will make the most academic progress in the self-contained EMR classroom.

5. The EMR student is not perceived to be more likely to be disruptive than is the regular student.

6. The EMR curriculum is seen as different than the regular curriculum.

7. The regular teacher is receptive to the EMR teacher's recommendation that the EMR student be placed in the regular classroom.

8. The EMR teacher should provide all or most of the materials for the regular teacher to use with the EMR student.

9. The EMR student should complete the same work as the regular student if in the regular classroom.

10. The regular teacher will need additional training and assistance to work with EMR students.

Several points seem especially important to discuss further. There does not seem to be a negative, or at least a strongly negative, reaction from regular teachers to the idea of having students mainstreamed. There are not seriously divergent views held by those with some experience in buildings with EMR students, vis a vis those who teach in buildings without one or more EMR classrooms. This latter statement would seem to indicate that teachers do have some common and hopefully realistic concepts about students with special needs. If this is true, it would be a shift from conclusions drawn from studies from the 1950's, which suggested that those who had firsthand experience with special students were more positive and receptive toward these persons.

One vitally important observation that can be drawn from the data in this study is that there is a critical need to alter the expectations of the EMR teacher if mainstreaming is to become a reality. The role of special teacher should be expanded to become one of resource person: one who is capable of working with other teachers, making recommendations, prescribing materials to be used, and serving as a specialist in the content areas as well as in dealing with the general problems of the special student. There is a corallary to this recommendation: that it is necessary that the regular teacher be trained to accept advice and assistance from another person who may be of similar rank in the organization. This norm of peer help is not perceived to be particularly prevalent in schools we are familiar with in Northeast Ohio.

Finally, we would recommend that there be expanded research done on this issue of teacher attitude. The process of articulating one's values relative to special children is seen as a valuable process in and of itself. Further, as one identifies inconsistencies between one's position and the position of others, or even internally, he/she is more likely to confront issues and find answers to concerns which, lacking clear articulation, may be perceived only as a vague stumbling block to helping students develop.

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